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ADDRESS

DELIVERED AT THE

ANNUAL COMMENCEMENT

OF

DICKINSON COLLEGE,

JULY 16, 1835,

BY ROBERT EMORY, A. M.

PROFESSOR OF LANGUAGES.

PUBLISHED BY RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES.

PRINTED BY JOHN W. WOODS.
1, Light street, Baltimore.
1835.

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The spirit of inquiry, which has prevailed in reference to Education, has already elicited such copious information on the subject, that some may be disposed to regard any further discussion of it as useless. Were the productions of the pen and of speech designed only to *instruct*, there might be some ground for the opinion. Could we content ourselves to treat subjects of vital public importance like the mock discussions of the schools, in which the object is to see how much can be said upon a question, we might admit that if all has not been said on the subject of education that was possible, at least there has been enough for the formation of our opinions, and the direction of our practice. But who does not know that after the public mind has been fully enlightened upon a topic, there still remains the more difficult, and not less important, duty, of moving it to action.

The thrilling appeals which so often emanate from the sacred desk, are called forth not so much by the ignorance, as by the apathy of the people. Week after week, we repair to the house of God, and hear from the same lips the same holy principles—principles which have perhaps been familiar to us from childhood;—yet we think not the service tedious or unnecessary, because we are conscious that as yet the appropriate effect upon our life and conduct has not been produced.

It is for the same reason that we think that the subject of education cannot be too often presented for our consideration. Although much light has been thrown upon it, by the zeal and learning of those who have treated it, still their labors have not yet produced those practical results which constituted their only object. Parents still allow their children to be educated upon erroneous systems;—public seminaries still send forth

pupils unqualified for the duties of private or of public life;—youth continue, for the most part, blind to their best interests, and are pressing their way, with indiscreet haste, to stations for which they are utterly incompetent. It is useless to discuss the best modes of teaching, or the best systems of discipline, while we have such abundant and conclusive evidence that, as yet, the very object itself of education is by many but little understood. Let us, then, devote a few moments to this inquiry:—*What is the proper aim of education?* It is an important inquiry. It intimately concerns all the relations of society;—the public, in their expenditures for the encouragement of learning;—the parent, in selecting the instructer of his child;—the teacher, in adopting his course of instruction;—the youth, in proposing to himself the proper object of his early efforts, and of his generous hopes;—all, all, are interested to be correctly informed upon a point in which error may lead to irreparable—to fatal consequences.

On such a question, I would not presume, before such an audience, to obtrude my own crude conceptions, unsupported, as they must be, by any length of experience. But though I may advance no new sentiments, and though I may defend those which have been heretofore advanced, by no new arguments, still, I trust, that I shall secure the more humble, though not less useful end, of presenting to you the matured opinions of the wise and good, in such a light, that, while they cannot fail to meet the approbation of your judgment, they may obtain the active concurrence of your practice.

That education in itself is desirable, I shall not consume your time in attempting to prove. The superiority of intelligent over ignorant man;—of him, who, in point of mental culture, has been almost fitted for the society of superior spirits, over him who is removed from the brute only by the possession, not by the exercise, of different faculties, is a subject which no longer admits of discussion. No! the question is not whether education is useful, but what kind of education is most useful. We conceive that in this case, as in every other which affects the interests of man, the proper criterion of

the utility of any object, is, its tendency to promote his happiness. What then is the system of education, that can best abide this test? Is it that which trains the youthful mind to habits of shrewd calculation, and sagacious planning for the accumulation of wealth? A Crœsus, in the midst of his countless treasures, could not extort from the Athenian sage an acknowledgement of his happiness. Is it that which sows the seeds of restless ambition, and creates an insatiable thirst of power? From 'Macedonia's madman' to the Corsican, the most successful aspirants have been as miserable, as their most unfortunate competitors. Is it that which stores the mind with a mass of learning, undigested and unsuited to any practical purpose? The wise man of Israel has assured us, that he that thus increaseth knowledge, but increaseth sorrow. Is it that which exclusively fosters some already predominant faculty, adding the influence of art to that of nature, to stimulate it to an unnatural growth? The fate of genius, in all ages, when unsupported by judgment, has become a proverb of misfortune. No!—neither distorted genius, nor barren learning, nor unlimited power, nor boundless wealth, are sources of real happiness, and therefore, neither the cultivation of the first, nor the acquisition of the others, is the proper leading object to be proposed in a course of instruction. What then is? It is *the cultivation, in just and harmonious proportion, of all the powers and faculties of man.* This alone can impart a complete and generous education: that which, to use the language of Milton, 'fits a man to perform justly, skilfully, and magnanimously, all the offices, both private and public, of peace and war.'

Such a definition, it is obvious, must include the cultivation, not only of the intellectual, but also of the physical and moral powers. And would that my limits permitted, or that my abilities enabled me, to brand, with an appropriate stigma, the criminal neglect with which these have been treated.—To depict in living colors the cruel folly of those, who, whether from misguided fondness, or blind devotion to fashion, bring up their children with feeble and sickly frames, to be the prey of lingering disease, or the victims of untimely death:—or to denounce, with

becoming indignation, the still more fatal thoughtlessness of those, who, while they train the body, and discipline the mind, leave the immortal spirit destitute of that moral culture, without which bodily vigor is pernicious and learning a curse. But I forbear. Leaving these interesting and momentous topics, to other and abler hands, I confine myself to the single branch of intellectual education.

Here then, we maintain, that however proper it may be, in the diversity of human occupations, that a man should not waste his strength by vain attempts to pursue them all, but rather confine himself to whatever one may be best suited to his capacity, still this remark does not apply to that period of life which is devoted to education. Then the great aim should be, not to replenish, but to enlarge the capacity;—not to prepare the student for any particular vocation, but to impart to him that mental vigor, by which he shall be qualified for any station to which subsequent events may lead.

It is true, that, in such a course, there must be much positive information acquired, and the student will be more or less fitted for particular offices; but still these are not the objects, but only the accompanying results: and so soon as any one of them loses this its appropriate secondary character, and assumes that of a principal, we have at once an education partial in its nature, and distorting in its effects. For, as he only is a perfect model of the human frame, who exhibits every member in symmetrical proportion; as he only is a perfect moralist, who combines in his character every virtue; so, he only is a perfect scholar, who has united in himself, and cultivated to their highest extent, all the attributes of mind.

The advantages, for every pursuit in life, of such an education, or as near an approximation to it as circumstances will admit, need but be stated to be acknowledged. Why is it that, upon the occurrence of those changes which are so frequent in our day, whereby the current of public business, without being diminished, is turned into new channels,—why is it that there is such an amount of private suffering? Is it not because the unhappy subjects of it have received a sort of mechanical edu-

cation, which fitted them for nothing but the routine of the particular business in which they had been engaged? Who is the physician upon whom you would rely in the hour of danger? Is it he who has merely stored his mind with the theories of others, and learned by heart the symptoms and treatment of every disease in the books? or is it he, who, by more profound investigation, and more intense study, than such plodding ever required, has attained so intimate a knowledge of the human constitution, that nature seems to have revealed to him, as to her favored priest, the mysteries of life and health. Who is the advocate to whom you would intrust the defence of your dearest rights? Is it he who, though familar with the forms of every action, and the decisions of every case, is lost when out of the beaten track of precedent? or is it he who has penetrated to the foundations of the law, and, from its profound depths, has brought forth principles whose application is as certain, as the basis upon which they rest is unchanging.

But, it may be asked, what are the studies best calculated to afford this development and discipline of the faculties? Of the various branches, each has in turn had its advocates, who have urged its claims, if not to exclusive, at least to pre-eminent attention. For one, I am as much opposed to 'catholicons and panaceas' in literature, as in medicine; and I would as soon believe that all the diseases of the body can be healed by a single remedy, as that all the faculties of the mind can be trained by a single study. As then all the kingdoms of nature are made to furnish their contributions for the preservation of health and the protraction of life, so let every department of science lend its aid to the formation and perfection of the mental character.

We are not here then to balance the respective claims of the ancient or of the modern languages, of the natural or of the exact sciences,—to depreciate the one or to extol the other; —but, to assert the importance of each in its appropriate place.

When it is considered, however, that of these, the study of the ancient languages has of late been an especial object of attack, it may not be thought improper on this occasion to make a short digression, in order to test its value, by the principles

which have been advanced. Before we do so, however, it becomes us to remove an objection of a different character, which has been urged against this study, and which, if it be established, is of itself sufficient to condemn it:—we mean that which relates to the moral influence of the classics. We do not deny that there is much in the writings of pagan antiquity that is false in principle, and corrupt in morality, and which, if unguardedly imbibed, can hardly fail to vitiate the youthful mind; but if, as should always be the case, judicious selections be made, and if whatever that is offensive even in these, be made the subject of appropriate comment, we conceive that the effect, so far from being injurious, will be highly salutary. When does the worship of the only true God appear more rational than when compared with the absurdities of heathen mythology? When do His character and attributes appear more glorious, than when He is contrasted with the contentious and libidinous deities of Greece and Rome? Who can contemplate with such profound admiration, the pure principles and the glorious hopes of Christianity, as the classical scholar? The humblest and most ignorant follower of the Cross, indeed, may look forward, with joyful confidence, to a blissful existence beyond the grave; but it is for him who has heard a Cicero, when contemplating that future state, exclaim, as if in anxious doubt, "if I err, it is a pleasing error,"—it is for such a one to appreciate the assertion that "life and immortality have been brought to light through the gospel."—All can admire the mild and peaceable spirit inculcated by Christianity; but it is for him who has seen inscribed on the schools of ancient philosophy, and has heard from the lips of its greatest masters, that 'revenge for an injury is as great a virtue as gratitude for a favor,'—it is for him to feel, with full force, that the religion which teaches us to love our enemies, is not the cunningly devised scheme of a carpenter's son, nor the invention of ignorant fishermen, but that, like its author, it emanated from the bosom of God.

Supposing then the objection to the moral tendency of classical learning to be removed, we come to what at present more immediately concerns us,—the consideration of the propriety

of substituting for it other studies, which, as is alleged, are more interesting in their character, and of greater practical utility.

That this study is in itself uninteresting, we cannot admit: that the modes of pursuing it may be so, we cannot deny. But when it is entered upon with due preparation, and prosecuted with proper guides, it is a path strewed with flowers, and which becomes more and more pleasing at each succeeding step; and if occasionally obstacles present themselves to the student, they do but afford him a faint representation of the course of his subsequent life, for which he will be ill qualified if he has not previously undergone that mental discipline by which he is taught to grapple with difficulties, and even to delight in the encounter.

But it is urged again that this is not a study of practical utility. The answer to this objection will depend upon the meaning attached to that expression. If by 'studies of practical utility' be meant those only which have an immediate bearing upon a man's business in life, we ask, what branches of liberal learning can be considered as answering that description? Why should the mass of the community be acquainted with the history of other days, or the manners and customs of other nations? What need have they of mathematics beyond the elementary rules of arithmetic? Why should they explore the external world to discover its constitution and laws, or turn their observation inward, upon the more mysterious operations of their own minds? What matters it to them to know whether the canopy above is filled with immense suns, the sources of light and heat to other systems, or is merely lighted up by innumerable tapers? Whether the meteors which occasionally flash through our atmosphere with a momentary splendor, are the fragments of some shattered planet, or the 'snuffings of the candles of heaven?' The starry host will perform their accustomed round, the fruitful showers will continue to descend, and the earth to bring forth her increase, the generations of men will come and go,—all the operations of nature will take place with their wonted regularity, alike whether man be informed or uninformed of their laws. It is true that such knowledge may

render them much more subservient to our purposes; but if this be the only object, it needs but a few to accomplish it. The engineer can lay out our rail-roads and canals; the mechanician can invent and construct our machines; the astronomer can calculate our almanacs, and nautical tables; the chemist can explore the elements of nature and combine them for the use of the artist. So that, for all the purposes of practical utility, in this low and contracted view of it, learning need never have emerged from the retirement of the study. But if by 'studies of practical utility' be meant those which tend to make happier men and better citizens, which add to private enjoyment, to personal influence and respectability, then we say let all the treasures of literature and science be brought within the reach of all;—let history and geography be studied, to enlarge and liberalize their views;—mathematics, to teach the art of demonstrative reasoning;—the physical sciences to develop the philosophy of experiment and induction;—the ancient languages, to cultivate the taste, to exercise the judgment, to strengthen the the memory, and to furnish an unfailing source of elegant and rational enjoyment. They all, as before remarked, have their appropriate offices and advantages. The very fact that some of them are better adapted to particular individuals than others, sufficiently proves that they call into exercise different faculties, and that therefore the course of instruction which does not combine them all, cannot impart a complete education.

Nor should the number and variety of these studies be made an objection to their all receiving a share of attention. The cultivation of one does not interfere with that of another. I appeal to the experience of every teacher, whether the diminution of the number of a pupil's studies, provided they have been adapted to his years and capacity, promotes, in any degree, his proficiency in the remainder; or whether it be not true, that a diminution of exercise is often followed by a diminution of strength. The best linguist in a class, may not always be the best mathematician; but he is not the worse mathematician for being a good linguist: on the contrary, the union of the two studies is much more likely to promote success in each. For

as the strengthening of any one member of the body imparts a vigor to the whole system, so the exercise of the mind upon one subject does but qualify it for more efficient application to another.

As the knowledge of any one branch is not increased, so neither is the time of acquiring it diminished by the omission of other branches. It does not follow, because a certain number of studies can be comprehended in a given number of years, that, therefore, any one of them will take a proportionally less time. During the period that is devoted to education, the youthful mind is in a course of gradual development, to which the different studies, and the different stages of each study, must be accommodated; and until the faculties have attained a corresponding growth, it is as incompetent to grasp the higher portions of any one study, as of all. The truth of this remark may be illustrated by the analogy of nature, in her operations in the material world. A productive soil may, at the same time, bring forth a variety of fruits; but by no diminution of the number, and by no improvement in the system of culture, can any one of them be ripened to its just maturity, until the appropriate season has rolled round.

If then it be true, that a close attention to all the branches of a liberal education is the best means of securing high attainments in each, or at any rate, what is more important, of promoting the vigor and energy of the mind, why should any of them be neglected by those who have an opportunity to prosecute them? Surely not to indulge the indolence of the student, nor to gratify the whims of mere theorists in education.

But it may be objected, by some shrewd calculators, that, if the youth be not destined for professional life, such a full course of study or, indeed, the thorough prosecution of any portion of it, will prolong the period of pupilage beyond the time at which he would be fitted for business. It cannot be denied that, in the present prosperous state of our country, most young men could obtain a support prior to the age usually allotted to the termination of a college course. But let it be recollected that the race is not to him that starts first, but to him that comes to it invigorated and disciplined by previous training;—that though

the well educated youth may be delayed in his entry into business, yet he will eventually commence it with a larger and more available capital.

But did there exist any such pecuniary disadvantages in this delay, as are represented, still the moral benefit would more than counterbalance them. When a young man is sent into the world with just enough of learning to make him flippant and conceited, with judgment immature, and principles unformed, it cannot be expected that he should be prepared to resist those temptations with which places of business are always beset. It is this, accordingly, which has filled the gaming table, and thronged the theatre,—which has brought disgrace upon many a son, and anguish upon many a family. When a ship is launched upon the deep, the prudent mariner is careful to provide whatever may contribute to her safety; but our youth are sent forth upon the voyage of life, with swelling sails, it may be, but often without ballast, or compass, or helm, amid rocks and whirlpools more dangerous than Scylla and Charybdis, to encounter storms more terrible than ever opposed the wanderer of Ithaca. What wonder, then, that so many of them meet with shipwreck and death.

But it is useless to attack all the Protean forms which the objections to a liberal education have assumed. We conceive that they have all been answered, if the position has been established, that the grand business of intellectual education is to train the faculties of the mind, and that this training is best effected by a union of all the branches of literature and science, which are adapted to the comprehension of youth.

If this view of the subject be correct, then female education has been sadly misunderstood. What though, in woman, the brightest endowments of genius, and the greatest acquisitions of learning must, for the most part, shine unseen; yet, does the companion and partner of man, the mother and nurse of the future hopes of the state, the church, and the world, need no expansion and discipline of mind? Away then with the mean and contracted notion, that the merest rudiments of education

will answer for a female; that she needs no geography but that of her own house, no arithmetic but that of domestic expenses, no art but the culinary, no science but that of economy. The sentiment, that female ignorance is the mother of domestic bliss, originated with that kindred sentiment, that ignorance is the mother of devotion, and should with it have long ago been consigned to its primitive darkness. Let it no longer be countenanced in this enlightened age, but let us afford to woman an education that shall enable her to claim with justice, and to maintain with dignity, that station in society, which is now too often held by the slender tenure of courtesy.

If the view which we have taken of education, be correct, then let parents not select for their children an occupation in life, perhaps before they can lisp its name, and educate them with exclusive reference to this. Until their faculties are developed, it cannot be known for what station they may be qualified. He whose genius you would cramp by some inferior employment, may be destined to enlighten the world. Give him, then, the best education within your power; and though he should fulfil no such high expectations; though upon the termination of his course of instruction, he should close his books of science and literature forever; nay, though it were possible that every vestige of positive information which he had derived from them, could be obliterated from his memory, still his time and his labor will not have been spent for nought. Where are the products of your own childish sports and boyish exercises? They have vanished with the hour that gave them birth; but the graceful form, the manly vigor, and the robust health, which they imparted, still remain as substantial proofs of their utility.

If the view which we have taken of education be correct, then, young gentlemen, neither is it for you, at this early period, to be forming projects for your subsequent career, and in consequence to neglect whatever, in your opinion, will not further them; for be assured, that as you know not what may be your future course, so, whatever it may be, no portion of knowledge which you may acquire will ever be found useless. Nor must

you suppose that such an education can be obtained by a bare attendance within the walls of a seminary, however judicious may be the course of instruction, or however competent the preceptors. It has been well said by an eminent writer, that "there is nothing more absurd than the common notion of instruction, as if science were to be poured into the mind like water into a cistern, that passively waits to receive all that comes. The growth of knowledge, rather resembles that of fruit; however external causes may in some degree co-operate, it is the internal vigor and virtue of the tree that must ripen the juices to their just maturity." Your parents, therefore, may afford you every facility with the most lavish kindness; your teachers may labor in your instruction with the most unwearied assiduity, but all will be of little avail, unless there be superadded the hearty co-operation of your own vigorous exertions. In this sense you must all be self-educated. Go on, then, as I am happy to know that many of you have already begun, go on, and imitate the example of the diminutive but instructive model of industry:—the bitterest herb, as well as the most fragrant flower, will alike yield honey to your toil. Go on, and in the mock combats of the gymnasium, prepare yourselves for the din, the dust, the keen encounter of that war of real life, in which the excellence of the weapons, and the skill of the combatants, must decide the victory.

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